

WRIGHT BROTHERS MASTER PILOT AWARD

Fairbanks Flight Standards District
Office Honoree 2004



McINTYRE, Dick. Dick McIntyre was born in the Kentucky mountains near Hazard. His father Alex, a coal miner, and his mother, Cordelia, raised 8 children. Dick went to a settlement school where he learned to work hard. There they would study half a day and work the other half. It was there that he met his future bride. After high school, he went to work as a helper in the lumber mill and eventually worked his way up the chain and became a manager of a small mill. In June 1942, Dick took the cadet exam for the military and that winter he started his training in the PT-22 and PT13. In March 1943, he soloed with 7 hours under his belt. This introduction to aviation was the end of a lumber career and the beginning of a passion.

In May 1944, he was assigned to duty with the 8th Air Force, 16th bomb group

in Sneterton-Heath England – where he flew the B-17. During this time, he flew 30 combat missions as the lead aircraft. During one mission, anti aircraft fire hit an engine on Dick’s aircraft, preventing him from maintaining his position in formation. As Dick returned to England, unable to keep up, the bomber above him dropped into his slot. Just as that aircraft took his slot in the formation it was destroyed by anti aircraft fire.

In 1946, Dick was assigned to Ladd Field in Fairbanks. At that time, little was known about the geography of the Arctic Ocean and the US Military was concerned that there might be islands or some other land mass that was useful to the Russians if they decided to launch an attack against the United States. For these reasons, the Strategic Air Command was created and Dick flew B-29 bombers for the 46th Reconnaissance Squadron in an effort to determine if this were the case. The mission, code named Project Nanook, remained classified “Top Secret” and under the direct command of SAC Headquarters in Washington, D.C. The first task for the squadron was to develop an accurate system of navigation for flying over the polar ice cap using existing technology. The 46th Squadron navigators’ hand drew charts for those areas, which were not previously charted. The search for land masses (code named “Floodlight”) was begun and on October 14, 1946, apparent land form was located, with the use of radar, approximately 300 miles north of Point Barrow, Alaska. Dick was the aircraft commander on this flight and he described it as being visible to the naked eye, with definite land contours, and standing out from the rest of the pack ice. There were no Soviet bases on it and it measured approximately 14

miles by 17 miles in size. Four to six weeks later it was determined to be a floating ice island. This ice island was subsequently named T-1 and two others located later were named T-2 and T-3.

On February 20th, 1947, in -45 degree temperatures, a B-29, the "Kee Bird" was prepared for an extended flight over the north pole and back to Ladd field. After takeoff, the Aircraft Commander noticed the cruising speed was lower than normal but he felt this was due to the weight of additional fuel and, as fuel was burned, the speed would increase to normal. As the aircraft crossed the arctic coast, the weather began to deteriorate making it difficult for navigators to take star sightings. The aircraft still had not achieved normal cruising speed. As they crossed the north pole and turned for the trip home the weather worsened, making celestial navigation impossible. This left the crew with only dead reckoning navigation and instruments that may not be accurate. The aircraft was actually off course and the crew had no idea of their location. With darkness approaching and fuel starvation imminent, they landed the big bomber on a snow-covered expanse of ice. The crew had alerted the operations officer at Ladd as to their predicament, and the search crew had been informed that the Kee Bird was somewhere along the 046 degree course from Ladd. As Dick searched along the course line, he was able to establish radio contact with the downed crew and they were finally able to inform them of their location; a frozen lake in northern Greenland. Dick was able to pass the location along to Rescue personnel and, as he was low on fuel, returned to Ladd. After spending three days in 24 hour darkness and temperatures as low -60, the crew was rescued.

The squadron continued to make significant contributions to the military and scientific communities regarding the northern polar region and, for this, Dick and the rest of the squadron received a Letter of Commendation.

Dick's 1946-1948 tour at Ladd Airfield made a lasting impression on him. In the summer of 1950, he and his family returned to Fairbanks where he started two businesses: Frontier Flying Service (a guide service) and a sporting goods store. Frontier Flying Service is still in operation, although not as a guide service but as a FAA Part 121 Air Carrier based in Fairbanks. During his aviation career, Dick guided many interesting people in the Alaskan wilderness, the most memorable for him being General Curtiss LaMay and Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands.

In 1958, Dick and spotter, or back-up hunter, Art Fields set out to try his hand at hunting a polar bear with a bow. Flying in his Cub, 70 miles from Cape Lisburne, they spotted tracks. After a very long chase, Dick found himself practically nose to nose with the bear and, using only the bow, Dick claimed a record Polar Bear and was listed in the Pope and Young bow hunting record.

Dick and Irene still reside in Fairbanks where they raised their two sons, Edward and John.